An Imaginary Incident Which Suggests Inspiring Thoughts to All Lovers of Clean Sport.

John McArdle, Referee

Gerald Beaumont's Mixture of Cold Business and Loyally to Right.

WHEN John McArdle was a wee boy his mother was wont to call him before her each evening and say:

"Now, John, thee maun square thy conscience, lad, and shame 'Auld Hornie.' Tell thy mither what thee did today."

Sometimes there were difficulties, as, for instance, when he acknowledged having thrown his first reader at the head of Miss Shaw while that lady was diligently applying the rattan to little Janie Roberts.

After the small defendant had justified his conduct with all the eloquence and skill at his command, Mrs. McArdle had a way of appealing to the supreme court.

"Now, lad," she would say, fixing her glasses more firmly on her nose, "thee hast defended thyself weel; what does John McArdle himsel' think about it?"

Thus bereft of every shield to his conscience, the boy was compelled to make answer:

"John McArdle says it was na' richt, mither, and I maun hae the stick."

"A vera guid decision, John," Mrs. McArdle would approve. "Thee be ever my ain true lad. Now gie me yon rod."

When the demands of justice had been appeased John McArdle would kiss his mother and go contentedly to bed.

He grew up, losing his Highland accent, but retaining, among other things, an ability to distinguish between what he might countenance in lighter moments and what John McArdle decided, upon calm reflection, was wrong, until at twenty-four he became the last thing on earth his mother had anticipated—the recognized middleweight champion of the world

They argued the matter at length, but when her son insisted that John McArdle himself could see nothing wrong in the boxing game, and when she saw that he was ever ready in other things to make peace with his conscience, she sighed and strove wistfully to understand.

But John McArdle's career as a boxer was short-lived. Fate, in the person of a reckless auto driver, turned him over on the road one afternoon, and when he lurched to his feet from a smother of broken glass and wreckage, his left arm was broken in three places. The doctors did a remarkably good job, but they could not supply him with an entirely new elbow.

So John McArdle became a referee, a profession which fills its ranks from two classes—those who are sporting writers and continue to remain such, and those who are ex-fighters and maintain cafes or billiard rooms, the walls of which they can adorn with photographs and capitalize past glories and present-day acquaintanceships. He established his cafe in the center of the theatrical district and set to work with native seriousness to become the best referee in the world.

McArdle learned that a referee must watch four gloves, must never let a boxer's back be turned to him, must always keep moving lest he interfere with the view of the spectators, must always be on the alert for the unexpected; and, hardest of all, he must hand down his decision as he sees it, without fear or favor, and without seeking or accepting advice from any one. And because he knew his business the fans came to call him Honest John McArdle and tolerated him ,which is as much reward as a referee can ever hope to receive.

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ALL this happened before the eighteenth amendment, before John McArdle realized in full his love for the same Janie Roberts whose books he had carried home from school, and before Canada Dick Peters was matched with the Philadelphia Phantom for the middleweight championship of the world. These three developments followed one another closely and each presented to John McArdle its individual perplexities.

First there was the dry law, which necessitated funds with which to remodel his establishment and made his future income problematical.

Then there was Janie. Janie Roberts was twenty, all rose and gold, with eyes of a Coventry blue and the lilt of the lark in her laughter. More than that, she was the daughter—and idol—of Big Steve Roberts, who had once been a dealer in a back room at Dawson and now leased a palatial suite in the Van Humphrey, maintaining a "Club for Gentlemen—Admission by Card Only."

In order that Janie should make no mistake in life regarding men and should marry outside the sporting world, Big Steve Roberts taught her how to distinguish those who carried trick dice from those who were on the level, and he sent her out to look the world over. But after two years Janie returned—to walk in the park on Sunday afternoons with John McArdle.

"Now, dad," she remonstrated, flexing a pink and white finger under his nose"—now, dad, there's no better father in all the world than you; and yet—you're a sporting man."

I've been a good father in spite of my associations," he replied, "not because of them. I want my little girl to marry a real man—one that nobody can reach; and I tell you, Janie, in the sporting world we're all losers."

"You're a dear old mule," said Janie lightly. "I suppose I'll have to obey you just out of force of habit, but you listen to me; either I marry John McArdle or I don't marry at all."

Thus matters stood, presenting to John McArdle a sort of triangular problem, his matrimonial and financial difficulties forming a right angle, with the hypothenuse represented by the approaching contest between his successor to the middleweight title and the only contender in sight.

The Philadelphia Phantom had flashed across the pugilistic horizon with all the brilliance of a meteor. Not since the days of Joe Gans had there been a man who understood ring generalship so well and was so good a boxer. Sporting writers agreed that there was but one man who might have taken his measure in a distance fight, and that was the one whose name was mentioned as the probable choice for referee.

Concerning Canada Dick Peters there was a wide difference of opinion. There were many who believed that the contender was all that was said of him. There were others, grown gray in the game, who opined that Peters was merely an artificial "card" who owed all his success to the shrewd manipulation of Jake Sheppler, and they did not believe the match would ever be held.

But finally the articles actually were signed, and not lond afterward Rudy Metzker, promoter of the match, dropped in for a quiet talk with John McArdle.

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"WELL, John," said Metzker when they had sunk into easy chairs in the privacy of McArdle's little office, "we're deadlocked over the referee question, and they've left it up to me to pick any one of three men. You and I have been pretty good friends, John."

"Yes," acknowledged McArdle, "we've been pretty good friends, and I'd like to referee the match."

Metzker nodded and chose his words carefully. "This is likely to be the last big match in America, John."

"Yes."

"This will be the last chance that any of us will have to make a penny out of the fight game. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes, I've thought of it. I've been wondering how you figured to make any money when you had to guarantee a $250,000 purse and hold the fight here."

"That's just the point," said Metzker. "I can't hope to do better than break even. When it comes to earning any money, I must look elsewhere than the gate receipts—the betting, for instance. Only one of two men can win, and I might know enough about both to come very close to picking the right one."

"Oh," said McArdle.

"Now, John," pursued the promoter, hitching his chair a trifle closer, "take the champion, for instance; he's inclined to hit pretty close to the belt with that left hook when he's tearing in—you've probably noticed that?"

"Yes," said McArdle.

"Suppose, John—only suppose, mind you—that the champion, say, in the seventh round should see he was getting the worst of it, and should deliberately foul his man. If you were the referee, John, what would you do?"

"Why, disqualify him, of course. What else could I do?"

"Some men," suggested Metzker, "might take into consideration a good many things. They might think of the moving pictures and the thousands who had paid good money to see the full show, or they might remember that the champion was a one-to-two shot in the betting, and they might figure that the title was worth protecting. If the challenger kept his feet some referees might rule that it was only a technical foul and dismiss the matter with a warning. Or if he actually went down, there is always the chance that it might be called a knockout."

"You know me, Rudy," reminded McArdle: "what do you think I'd do?"

The promoter regarded his friend thoughtfully. "I think," he answered, "that you'd referee the match on the square and call a foul when you see one. In fact, you couldn't do otherwise and be Honest John McArdle."

"No," said McArdle slowly, "I guess that's true."

"Well, that much is settled, then," dismissed Metzker. "The fee will be $5,000, in any event. We will hope that there's no foul; but in case such an unfortunate thing happens, and you have to do your duty in the face of the betting and everything—why, it would seem no more than fair, John, that the referee should receive more—say, twenty-five thousand."

"Ah," said McArdle.

Metzker pressed the point home. "You see, John, it would hardly do for the referee to lose his nerve at the last moment, or not be in a position to see a foul blow if one was delivered—say, in the seventh round. Take a man like Big Steve Roberts—he might have the bank roll bet that way, and Steve isn't likely to forgive the referee who made a mistake like that. In fact, Big Steve would be just the sort to stage a little surprise party for the man who double-crossed him."

"Is he in on this, Rudy?"

"In on what?" countered the promoter sharply.

"I mean," corrected McArdle, "is Roberts going to plunge on this fight?"

"Big Steve," said Metzker gently, "is the one who doped it out that a foul was likely, and he always backs his hunches—hook, line and sinker."

The promoter arose and dusted the cigar ashes from his vest.

"Don't let anything I have said bother you, John," he admonished. "After all, the betting is no concern of yours, and I know you don't care who wins. The public believes in you, John, and they know that you'll do your duty in the ring. That's all in the world any of us expect of you. I'll tell the papers you're the man. Kind of a hot day, ain't it?"

"Yes," said McArdle, "it is warming up."

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AT the supper table that evening McArdle told his mother that he had been selected to serve as the third man in the ring for the big match. She missed the enthusiasm with which he had been wont hitherto to discuss such appointments. As the days passed he became more taciturn and depressed. Mrs. McArdle attributed this to something else.

"Is it the lass, John? What way do you no go out wi' Janie of a Soonday? Hae ye been fechtin'?"

"No, mother, we're still good friends—only I'm busy."

"Thee had better tell thy mither what's troublin' thee, lad."

But he shook his head. "'Tis nothing," he assured. "I was just wondering if $25,000 would remodel my place into a high-class billiard parlor. I'm losing money now."

"Whist!" said Mrs. McArdle. "'Tis enouch money to buy all E'nbrugh!"

Her son smiled and went out, and for the next week or so was very busy, visiting the rival training camps, chatting with the newspaper men and incoming celebrities and catering to the night crowds who made his cafe a rendezvous as the day for the big fight drew near.

To the surprise of sporting writers, the match developed the heaviest betting in years. Canadian sportsmen were reported to have formed a pool to back the challenger at the prevailing odds of 2 to 1. Despite the flood of coin that developed in support of the Philadelphia Phantom the odds remained stationary, for in every city throughout the country Canada Dick Peters enjoyed a mysterious backing.

Finally the big day came. John McArdle sat down to an early lunch at home.

Now, the soil in which the slip is planted is the soil wherein the tree holds root. John McArdle turned to his mother and relapsed into the speech by which they understood one another best.

"I be verra fasht aboot somethin', mother. John McArdle is in a verra bad way. I hae gie th' word to referee this fecht fairly and to ca' a foul when I see't."

"And what for no, John?"

"I ken the foul will be a trick—the best mon will nae win, mither. The twa lads hae sold oot to Janie's father, an' I dinna ken what to do."

He entered into greater detail in an effort to make her understand, but she knew only that her bairn was facing a crisis in his life, and that it was entirely a man's problem.

"SHE LAID ME EVERY CENT OF HER OWN MONEY, JOHN, THAT YOU'D THROW 'EM OUT."

"The maun do kha' John McArdle tells thee, lad," she told him sadly. "Thy mither canna help thee."

"Aye," he said, and bent to kiss her. "Gie to the big chair now and dinna worry."

As he was leaving, he looked back and saw her adjusting her spectacles, and he understood that until he returned she would sit there with the Bible turned to the window.

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THE naked bulk of the huge open-air arena, plastered with advertising signs, rose from the National League ball park. At 2 o'clock the newspaper men estimated the crowd at fifty thousand and the receipts at close to three hundred thousand dollars. Rudy Metzker had played in luck as usual.

The preliminaries went off well, too, and the crowd was in good humor. There was the usual list of messages and challenges to be read, and a long line of celebrities to be introduced. Then the crowd settled down expectantly, only to get to its feet again, yelling, as the rival retinue left their quarters and squirmed a path down the congested aisles.

There is something demoralizing about the concentrated gaze of fifty thousand men marshaled around a twenty-foot square of canvas. Let him who may not think so crawl through the ropes as John McArdle did, and then see how many hairs of moral rectitude he will split.

When Canada Dick Peters came into the ring the referee noticed that the challenger's belt was two inches higher on the waist line than was customary. The thing would be staged very cleverly.

Billy Gordon, veteran announcer, signaled to McArdle, and the latter stepped forward to the ropes, facing the multitude. One hand on the referee's shoulder, the bald-headed master of ceremonies gave tongue:

"Honest John McArdle," he shouted, "will referee this contest."

Looking out at the ocean of upturned faces and hearing the patter of thousands of approving hands, the former middleweight champion understood fully then that a referee is something bigger than a ring arbiter—he is the representative of public opinion and the guarantor of clean sport and fair play.

The battery of sporting writers seated at their telephone and telegraph instruments looked up to find the referee leaning over the ropes above them.

"Boys," said McArdle, "I'm going to make an important announcement in a minute, and I want you to put it on every wire in the country."

To the quick chorus of "What's doing John?" he shook his head and, walking back to the center of the ring, summoned the men from either corner for their final instructions. They shook hands and went back to the ropes, waiting for the bell.

John McArdle held up his hand for silence and faced the crowd. His voice carried into the far corners.

"Gentlemen," he cried; "this will be a fifteen-round contest for the middleweight championship of the world. All bets on this match are officially called off. May the best man win! Let 'er go!"

With the fall of the referee's arm the bell clanged dully, the rival clusters of seconds vanished, and the challenger stepped briskly forward to meet the champion. McArdle moved along the ropes to the right.

From the arena rose the murmur of thousands of men interrogating one another. From mouth to mouth the words of John McArdle were repeated until every one in the multitude knew that the referee had exercised his prerogative, and that all bets had been nullified. Immediately the rumors began to mushroom; the champion was out of condition; Peters had failed to make the weight; the Phantom had injured his hand in a training bout. But down at the ringside certain men looked at one another and knew the truth. John McArdle had double crossed them.

Above their heads the third man in the ring plodded onward in a weary circle, eyes intent on the thumping gloves. He was wondering what the next move would be. So far, what he had done applied only to activities outside the ring. Within the squared circle he was bound by the rules, and he knew it.

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THE round ended with the men sparring cautiously in the middle of the ring. McArdle went to a neutral corner and leaned against the ropes with his arms folded. Below him the newspaper men were seeking vainly to capture his attention. Chick Burley, the champion's chief second, and Jake Scheppler approached from opposite corners, taking care that all the ringside should hear their demand for an explanation.

McArdle waved them back.

"What's the betting to you?" he demanded. "You're getting your cut out of the purse, ain't you? Well, go back and fight for it."

Out of the corner of one eye the referee saw Big Steve Roberts hunched in a chair at the ringside, and back of him the purple-faced figure of Rudy Metzker. He appreciated that there were probably fifty men within as many feet of him who were already planning their revenge.

While breaking a clinch in the second round the referee found an opportunity to express himself under his breath.

"Don't try to pull any fouls on me," he hissed. "The game's up—understand? Come on. You're locked; step out!"

He clapped his hands and the men broke cleanly. The Philadelphia Phantom suddenly cut loose with an exhibition of the footwork that had made him famous. He danced in and out, working a straight left to the head and shifting into a right uppercut with a dazzling rapidity and precision. In the fourth round he dropped his man for the count of five, and the crowd went wild.

But in the fifth round the challenger came back and rushed his opponent all around the ring, and in the sixth the Phantom was apparently groggy and covering up.

The arena became a roaring whirlpool. The crowd had entirely forgotten the early suspicions prompted by the referee's announcement. Here was a fight that would live in history.

Even John McArdle was fooled. He reasoned that since there was no longer any object in pulling a foul, the fight was being made on the square. And when the seventh round passed safely, with both men apparently nursing their strength, he breathed easier, and a great weight was lifted from his mind.

It was a small thing that brought him his first uneasiness, and it escaped the attention of every one else. Between the ninth and tenth rounds he noticed that the seconds in both corners were not washing off their men, though both were bleeding slightly. Now, it is the part of a good handler to send his man up at the beginning of the round looking clean and fresh, just is it is the part of an experienced boxer to do the bulk of his fighting in the last sixty seconds of the round rather than the first.

But the men faced each other for the tenth round looking battered and battle weary. McArdle was puzzled. He wondered still more when his skilled eyes noted first a certain hesitancy in the movements of both boxers, and then that they were swinging wild. He recalled quickly that all through the fight there had been no blows to the wind or to the jaw. The champion had dropped his man with a left hook high on the head. The challenger had slowed the Phantom down with a body attack on the ribs. No vulnerable spot had been touched.

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SUDDENLY the whole thing became plain to the shirt-sleeved Scotchman. The first seven rounds must have been carefully rehearsed; the men had met secretly and practiced every blow. Now they were at a loss, because they had never anticipated the thing would go any farther than the seventh round. Under instructions they were going to stall to a draw and try it again with a different referee in the ring.

"I'm gone," he thought. "The hounds!"

The eleventh and twelfth rounds passed uneventfully, and the temper of the multitude changed. Gradually the words of the referee were recalled and gloom settled down on the arena. The bleachers began an impatient stamping punctuated with catcalls. On the main floor there was moody silence with significant glances at the motion picture machines purring steadily from their tower.

The thirteenth round came, and after a sharp rally the men dropped into a clinch and wrestled futilely. From high up in the "five-dollar heaven" some one filled his lung and roared out:

"Roommates!"

The crowd laughed, and a red-faced man sitting five rows from the ringside turned to a companion.

"Well," he said, "I suppose we have to expect that sort of thing these days. Boxing, base ball, racing—one after another the crooks get into them all, and there is no man they can't reach. I suppose if I was on the inside of this I wouldn't be hollering, either."

Up in the ring the referee moved forward and spoke in pleading tones.

"Come on, boys, cut loose; don't stall any more. The game's on its last legs now. Don't kill it."

The Philadelphia Phantom wrenched himself free from a clinch, boxed prettily for a moment and then left himself wide open for a left lead to the head. The challenger took advantage of the opening and shot a glove against the Phantom's jaw. The latter's knees sagged, but the referee was aware that Peters had "pulled" his punch and the blow had done no harm. Its apparent effect was faked.

They clinched, and again the third man in the ring whispered his warning.

The titleholder felt that he was perfectly safe. He knew there would be any one of a dozen excuses to fall back upon afterward, and he was being guaranteed a fortune. He twisted his lips at the pleaded referee.

"Fwan!" he advised.

McArdle dropped back. For the first time, while a round was in progress that afternoon, the referee stood still. Back of him the spectators began to protest that he was obstructing their view, but he continued motionless until he saw Canada Dick Peters feint out his opponent and then swing a right hand that was deliberately three inches short of the opening.

John McArdle turned his back on both men, and leaning over the ropes, addressed the timekeeper.

"Ring the bell," he directed.

Pete Glidden, who had held watch on every championship contest for a quarter of a century, looked up with startled eyes.

"There's a minute to go yet, John," he protested.

"Ring the bell," McArdle reiterated dully, "and keep on ringing it; I'm going to throw 'em out!"

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FOR one astonished second the timekeeper hesitated; then his hand went obediently to the gong, and it clanged loud and insistently. The champion and the challenger lowered their gloves and looked at McArdle. Every sound in the vast arena was hushed.

The referee raised both hands in the air. In the stern, disapproving shake of the head, the multitude sensed the official verdict and rose, electrified.

"No contest!" roared John McArdle. "Now get out of the ring, both of you!"

Of what followed, John McArdle had but a vague memory. He knew that the Philadelphia Phantom had charged across the ring and swung a right hand. He remembered that he had ducked and dropped the champion with a hook to the chin. He recalled dark forms climbing through the ropes in every direction, and he had an impression that before he had been carried to the floor under the weight of a dozen men, he had singled out Big Steve Roberts and knocked the gambler off the platform.

When he was again in possession of his senses, he had pulled his world down about his ears, and was being escorted home under police protection.

When John McArdle and his mother had cleared away the supper dishes, and had talked the whole thing over, Mrs. McArdle said:

"Thee be ever my ain guid lad. Thee has shamed Auld Hornie and nae ither thing matters."

"Aye," said John, "but 'tis no' over yet, mither."

The door-bell rang. Dusk had fallen. They looked at each other.

"Gie to bed, mither. I'll answer 't."

He closed the dining-room door, hesitated, and then going to his own room, slipped a revolver into his pocket before proceeding to the front door.

On the doorstep stood Big Steve Roberts. A limousine purred at the curbing.

"I've got something to say to you, John," said the gambler; "come down to the car a moment."

McArdle's lip curled. "Ain't you game enough to say it to me here?" he queried.

Roberts merely smiled. "I'll come inside if you don't mind," he suggested; "it'll only take a minute."

McArdle led the way to the sitting-room, and closed the door. They sat down with the table between them.

"Well, John," said Big Steve, "you played the deuce this afternoon, didn't you?"

"Yes, Steve, I guess I did."

The gambler pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I've just come from the district attorney's office, John. Peters squealed and gave the whole thing away. The gate receipts will go to charity. I suppose you know what every paper in the country is going to say tomorrow?"

"I can imagine," McArdle answered, "they'll say that we've seen our last big fight in this country. I thought of that just before I stopped it."

"They'll say," contradicted Roberts, "that the third man in the ring this afternoon saved the fight game for America; they'll say that he proved the sport was bigger than the crooks who are in it; they'll say that you showed beyond any possible doubt that when John McArdle is the referee the public can count on a boxing match being on the square, and that's all America asks of any sport: Why, John—don't you see that what you did this afternoon will stiffen up the back of every referee and sporting writer in the country?"

McArdle produced a pipe and filled it slowly.

"Why should you come down here to tell me this?" he asked.

Big Steve Roberts studied the toe of one shoe. "What is one man's loss," he answered, "is another's gain. You made me drop a pretty big bet this afternoon——"

"I called all bets off," said McArdle. "The newspaper boys recorded it."

Big Steve shook his head. "Fifty thousand dollars I lost today—and my daughter, too. Janie and I had it out last night, John, and I put all my cards on the table to prove to her that you were no different from the rest of us. And, John, do you know what the kid did?"

He put the question with pride.

"You know what my little girl did?" he repeated.

McArdle shook his head.

"She laid me every cent of her own money, John—$25,000 at two to one—that you'd call all bets off and throw

"Gie to bed, Mither. I'll answer 't."

Just then the door-bell gave three imperative little rings.

"Aha!" said Big Steve comfortably. "I thought so. Now you're in for it! I told you to come down to the car, and you wouldn't do it. Take a tip from me, son, and give Janie her own way before she takes it. Now go to the door like a man and learn what she thinks of you!"

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Listen, World!

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY ELSIE ROBINSON

HAVE you ever turned over an old, rotting plank, pal, and surveyed the mimic world revealed? Stupid white grubs nosing about clumsily—horrible, slimy things that seemed out of place in a beautiful, sunshiny creation—and multitudes of small, gray, flattish, scuttling creatures which we used to call "sour bugs" in our home town. A weak, unhealthy world, that tiny kingdom of darkness, but nevertheless a feverishly active world when the rotting plank was lifted.

Pal, the plank has been lifted for all of us. War lifted it. That plank was the social order of the past generations. Once it was a sound and useful plank. Beneath it the seeds of civilization germinated and found shelter in their infancy. But the generations passed and the plank began to rot. Its supports crumbled—it collapsed upon the free action of men—it became a menace rather than a protection. Foulness spawned beneath it and at last bred an upheaval, which wrecked the plank, so that all which lay beneath it was exposed.

As you are looking at the world today you are seeing a society from which the covering has been torn. In a way, it is well that the plank has been removed. In time the earth will be cured of its disease and grow sweet and fertile once more. New life will spring up unhampered—a cleaner, sturdier life because it has grown in the open air.

For the future there is great promise. But in the immediate present the prospect is not so happy. Weakness and decay lay beneath that rotting plank and are now released into our midst. They scuttle about, they get in our way and spread their unwholesomeness over the healthier life which is trying to spring up about them. Momentarily by their very numbers and insistence they seem to triumph over nobler creatures.

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I AM not referring to the criminals that follow in the wake of every war. Humanity can deal with criminals, for their motives are obvious. I speak rather of those small-minded, sour-blooded people who assumed a passing importance and authority during the war period and who, once intrenched, are exercising a malicious influence upon our national life—the mean little people who live next door and make life miserable for all of us.

How they prick and nag, meddle and hinder! And so camouflaged are they by righteous pretense that it is almost impossible for us to understand the nature of their actions or segregate the helpers from the hinderers. Yet, if we are to save civilization in a time of very great peril, we must learn the truth about this element.

Who are these petty tyrants and how may we know whether their deeds are good or evil? Science has a name for such people—it calls them neurotics.

What is a neurotic? It is a human "sour bug." It is something that has lived under a plank of repression all its life and whose only idea of bliss is to coop others under similar or worse planks.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of human beings—the positive type and the negative type. The positive type expresses itself in definite action. It reaches ahead, not back. It endeavors to achieve something by its own advancement. But the negative type attempts to grab glory, not by its own advancement, but by the other fellow's belittlement. It is not capable of constructive action, so it attempts destructive meddling and hindrance.

When the development of a nation is proceeding on its normal course such people do not have a chance. Their malicious squirmings are swamped by the larger activities of normal men. But when society has been thrown into confusion, as it was in the late war, and all moral values twisted, the neurotic has his day.

He surges to the front loudly clamoring for the "good old days and the good old standards." It matters not that the "good old standards" may have resulted in that very catastrophe which involves mankind. One does not think logically in time of war. The neurotic's argument seems infallible.

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WE look at the good old days and long for their return. We look look at the present debacle and bewail our misery. Forthwith we conclude that this agitator is right. We do not call him a neurotic. We call him a prophet, a savior. And instantly his intolerance, his stupidity and bigotry, from which we once would have shrunk, seem divinely inspired enthusiasm and prudence.

Thus the neurotic comes into power, profiting by the stronger man's bewilderment and humiliation. He could never have achieved prominence by his own strength, but he can fatten on another's weakness as the sour bug fattens on dead life under the board.

In every conceivable department of life the sour bug detects a lurking evil. Fashions, industries, churches, schools, suffrage laws, immigration laws, clubs, human associations and human customs of all sorts are alike subjected to befouling suspicion.

The little girl who bobs her hair, pinks her cheeks and strides forth freely in her shortened skirt is branded with the most shameful of titles. The wife or mother who seeks work outside the home is bitterly assailed, with never a charitable thought for her possible motives. All members of different churches, different lodges, different races are targets for abuse and persecution.

Anything new, any forward gesture, anything that differs from the old life under the plank arouses the sour bug to a frenzy of vituperation.

"But the present state of affairs is terrible," you cry. "Surely we need guidance, constructive criticism, reformation."

You're right. We surely do. But the sour bug is not a constructive critic—he's a destructive crank. He's not a reformer, merely a meddler. He does not strive to guide, but to prohibit. He does not want to see humanity saved, for that would deprive him of his job as a nagger. In a perfect world what would he do?

He and his kind have not the courage of the adventurers, the genius of the inventors, the ambition of the leaders, the fortitude of the pioneers, the reckless spirit for self-sacrifice of the rebels. Under the normal tests of manliness they are proven "seconds." But a social catyclysm gives them their opportunity. They cannot help, but they can hinder. They cannot bless, but they can bother. And by that peculiar nature of his activities you may know the sour bug when you meet one.

Is he always prating of the days that have gone—is he always sneering at innovation and condemning new movements—is he always suspecting, insinuating, rolling a mysterious eye and hinting at marvelous punishments—is he always seeing evil in everything but himself? Then he's a sour bug. For everything the sour bug is and wants and does is negative.

SOCIETY is tremendously in need of honest, loyal service. So much has been destroyed, so little rebuilt. The viewpoint which men for generations thought trustworthy has failed them in a pinch. We must evolve new viewpoints, traditions, ideals.

But the sour bugs will never evolve them for us. They will only find fault—they will never create. Beware the sour bug, be he an individual or an association! Beware the warped spirit that can do nothing but rant and prohibit!

And beware the spirit of the sour bug within yourself.

It is so much easier to sneer than to sympathize or understand—condemnation attracts cheap glory far more quickly than co-operation. But in the end it doesn't pay, pal. The sour bug is a sour bug all his life. Never will he know a moment of free and beautiful flight, never will he engage in honest combat, never will he set forth on noble adventures, never will he contribute aught to the common wealth. From the darkness he came, to the darkness he will go, and his squirmings in the meantime bear the certain taint of mildew.

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